1:Petrullo E-6 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

Without the aid of the Yaruros the crossing of the Orinoco would have been impossible. They are expert canoeists and safely ferried our baggage to the other side. Believing that I could handle a canoe, for by this time according to the Yaruros there wasn't anything that I could not do, since their gods had told them that I was one of them, I was asked to cross in an empty canoe, with the help of a 12-year-old boy. The canoe had several gaping holes in stern and bow about 10 inches in diameter. With serious misgivings, I embarked with the youngster paddling in the bow. Cross-currents, winds, and whirlpools made the half hour a very exciting one. Several times I gave up hope of crossing safely or of returning to our starting point, only to be encouraged by the laughter of my young companion who, when we were in extreme danger, would turn and grin happily at me. However, we crossed safely and soon afterwards we hoisted sail, which consisted of my mosquito net tied to an improvised mast, and with the east wind behind us and with gunwales even with the water, we went flying up the Capanaparo. Our sailing was far from being monotonous, for every few minutes it was necessary to use strength and skill to keep the canoe upright. Three days later we reached Landaeta's camp.

The trip to Urbana had been exciting and interesting, but I brought back with me ulcers on my feet which incapacitated me for the rest of my stay with the Yaruros. My feet, swollen to immense proportions and with open sores, refused to support my body, and I was forced to forego any further trips, short or long. My life consisted from now on, for about six weeks, of lying on the sand or in a hammock, surrounded by my affectionate friends, talking about the universe, the Yaruros, and their ideas.

In order to make it possible for Landaeta and his people to stay with me on this particular beach rather than move about in search of food, I turned over all of my food stock to them, which was consumed in two days, and thereafter they shared equally with me the products of the hunt. From that day on, I was completely in their care and Landaeta never left me. The burden of hunting fell on the younger men who went out every morning in search of crocodiles and turtles, of honey, palm nuts, roots, and fish. My illness was of great concern to the Yaruros. They did what they could to make me comfortable and they went to special trouble to bring titbits, such as honey and nuts. Landaeta and a woman shaman sang over me often. This illness was a fortunate event in a way, for it permitted an uninterrupted intimacy between us.

There is a sharp contrast between the simple primitive material culture of the Yaruros and the wealth and poetic intensity of the spiritual. The casual visitor would see merely a naked people plying

1: Petrullo E-3 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

841 piece of cloth. (Among the peoples of the Xingu in Brazil she is made to wear her hair over her face, and she is kept from the sight of men.) Whether during this period special initiatory rites are performed I was not able to find out. This part of Yaruro culture is considered to be in the women's domain, and, being a man, I was kept from delving into it.

123 841

MARRIAGE

527 The Yaruros are poor in social ceremonies. Anciently they may have practiced a great many of them but today social life is comparatively simple.

885 When a boy is ready to marry he may approach his father, or as a matter of fact, the father may approach the son. In any case he is 791 sent to the shaman, who informs him that now he should be ready 584 to assume the duties of a man, and proceeds to instruct him in the nature of those duties. He is told that he must love and cherish his [183] wife; supply her plentifully with food, clothing, ornaments, and [577] children; that he must never use harsh words toward her and that he must take care of her when she is sick; that he must never quarrel with her family, with whom he is expected to live; and of particular importance, that he must remember to take care of his father-in-law and mother-in-law. All of this is ordained by Kuma.

584 The shaman will then approach the boy's uncle who has a marriage- 585 able daughter. No special ceremony seems to take place. The boy 791 simply goes to live with the wife's family and assumes his duties of taking care of her as well as of his parents-in-law.

SICKNESS AND DEATH

751 Not much material was available on sickness. It must be remem- 757 bered that the Yaruros have been in contact with European ideas for several centuries and that they understand the use of medicine for the cure of a specific illness.

753 Nevertheless, Kiberoh, the evil night spirit, is in some fashion asso- 754 ciated with illness. If Kiberoh enters the body of a person, the latter will become ill. In such cases the only cure is the intercession of Kuma, who can be called upon to help by the shaman or musico, a term adapted from the Spanish to describe the singing shaman.

755 The sick person is laid on the ground with his head pointing to the east. At sundown the shaman will stand to the north of the sick person and will proceed to sing, accompanying himself with the [841] rattle. The rest of the people, with the exception of any woman in her menstrual period, line up behind the shaman and sing and dance as they generally do during any of the shamanistic performances. If they indulge in any dancing, however, they do not go around a

1: Petrullo E-3 (1933-34) 1939 SS19 Yaruro SS19

pole in a circle but merely move forward and backward. During the performance it is prohibited for anyone to pass by the head of the sick person. The shaman will sing all night and if by morning the sick person has not shown any marked improvement the woman shaman will lie in a hammock with her head pointing to the east and will continue the singing. Other women will sit in the hammock with her and sing all day long. I myself underwent such attention. If the wife shows little interest in the welfare of her husband it is concrete proof that she does not love him and it is believed he will die. In this there are two factors to be considered from my observation of these people. The first is that a lack of wifely interest is the equivalent of bad medicine and that the husband himself will feel so disconsolate that all desire to live will be lost.

If the sick person dies during the night nothing is done except to stop the singing and dancing. At daybreak his people will drink vast quantities of chica and prepare for the funeral rites. If the sick person happens to be a woman in her menstrual period it is important to note that she is in the care of the woman shaman. The man shaman does not dare to sing to her.

In the morning the dead person is washed by the women and the body is wrapped in a hammock and taken to the burial place. The brothers and the uncles carry the body. The father and mother do not accompany the body to the grave, but in the case of a married man the widow does. The body is interred in the hammock with the head pointing to the east. The bow and arrows, whatever clothing he may have possessed, and any equipment are buried with him, but neither food nor water is necessary. The night after the burial there is a feast in the camp, but the taboo on fish is observed by everyone. The shaman and the people will sing the equivalent of:

> The dead one died here, now he has arrived in the Land of Kuma, and there he has been made young again (if a child dies, it becomes a young man or woman, according to the sex). He will know nothing but joy now and will have everything he may desire.

The widow goes on a strict diet for four days. All fires which were burning at the time of the death of the individual are put out and fresh ones are built. On the fourth day the two men, who have put the dead body into the pit, and the widow, bathe; they fast on the fifth. On the fifth night the shaman sings in order to find out if the dead person has reached Kuma, if he has been given a new name, if he has been made young, strong, and rich. For a month after this the widow keeps a strict diet and she is not married for a long time. It is believed that if a man marries a widow soon after her husband has died he will die soon of the same sickness.